CSREES National Water Quality Program

Title: Developing a Unified Message Concerning Water In Georgia

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Theme: Pollution Assessment and Prevention

Situation: In Georgia, the population continues to grow at a rapid pace while the water resources do not. Both water quantity and water quality issues in Georgia are very pressing, and the only hope for maintaining a good quality of life in Georgia is for Georgians to change behaviors that unnecessarily waste water and degrade water quality.

Objectives: 1) Bring together state agencies and non-government organizations (NGOs) that currently work to educate Georgia's public on water issues to enhance partnering and exchange of ideas and information through a joint effort. 2) Identify key water issues that Georgians need to have further information about. 3) Determine the current understanding of Georgians concerning key water issues facing Georgia. 4) Develop a unified approach among the participants of the Task Force to raising awareness and educating Georgians on the major water issues identified.

Methods: The Pollution Prevention Assistance Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources formed a Task Force of Georgia state agencies involved with water issues and NGOs involved with water issues to work together to develop a unified approach to educate Georgians on preserving the state's precious water resources. The Task Force hired consultants to carry out focus groups and surveys to determine the most important water issues of concern to the state, and what Georgian's understood about these water issues. The results of focus groups and surveys have been compiled. The results of the Task Force study will be used to decide the best strategies for effective public education based on the priorities determined and the current understanding of the public.

Partnerships: The Task Force is made up of several state agencies including the Pollution Prevention Assistance Division, Environmental Protection Division, Department of Community Affairs and Wildlife Resources Division; federal agencies such as the US Environmental Protection Agency and NGOs such as the Georgia Water and Pollution Control Association, the Georgia Water Wise Council and the Georgia Conservancy. These groups all contributed input to the process of developing water issue priorities for the state. They also shared information on their water issue educational programs through meetings of the Task Force.

Research: The Task Force was oriented to education and outreach activities, but research had to be conducted to prioritize water issues and determine the information that was needed by the public and the kind of messages that would have the most impact with Georgia citizens.

Resources: The cost of the consultant work was provided by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Results: The first focus group held brought together 50 key leaders of the state involved in water use and water quality to prioritize water concerns for the state. From this leadership focus group, the top four issues related to water were determined. Then based on the results of the leadership focus group, general audience surveys were conducted all over Georgia to determine the level of understanding and concern for the priority issues of all Georgians. These results will be presented to key industry, agriculture and policy leaders of Georgia at an upcoming Water Summit. At the summit the participants will discuss and begin to develop strategies to provide the needed public education effort that will make Georgians better stewards of their water resources and inform them on how they can be involved in decision-making concerning water issues.